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Kimberly S. Devers
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**DISCIPLINE
FOR THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY:
GIVING BACK DIGNITY TO STUDENTS WITH
SEVERE BEHAVIOR DISORDERS**

by

Kimberly S. Devers

A THESIS

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree in
Learning Disabilities**

Rowan University

Approved by

Date May 8, 2000

ABSTRACT

**KIMBERLY S. DEVERS
DISCIPLINE
FOR THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY:
GIVING BACK DIGNITY TO STUDENTS WITH
SEVERE BEHAVIOR DISORDERS
2000
DR. URBAN
LEARNING DISABILITIES**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the “Discipline with Dignity” program in increasing appropriate behaviors in the classroom setting. The Revised Behavior Checklist was completed by the classroom teacher for four students in each classroom, to establish a degree or frequency of problem behaviors and to designate a target behavior for which to focus upon. After five months, the behaviors of the eight students were again rated by the checklist to determine if there was any change. The study revealed that on the pretest checklist the students scored the highest in the area of conduct disorder and attention problems/immaturity. Minimal decreases were noted on the post test checklists and both classes showed an increase in several categories. A marked increase in self - esteem and self -confidence was noted in the classroom where the program “Discipline with Dignity” was implemented. Also noted was an increase in the opportunities to teach and model self- responsibility verses disciplining with consequences.

MINI - ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the effectiveness of positive discipline and the program “Discipline with Dignity” as behavior management techniques with students classified with severe behavior disorders. The study revealed a slight decrease in certain behaviors and an increase in self- confidence and self- esteem.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

We as parents, administrators, and educators are experiencing increased incidents of school violence and the need for dealing with school discipline increase. “Our schools have become microcosms of society scarred by the racial and ethnic hatreds, random violence, families in ruin, poverty, dislocation, and the collapse of communities scourged by drugs and disease.”(Eakins,S.)

As educators we face a different child than we did years ago. Children now bring to class a whole host of physical, emotional, psychological, and neurological problems stemming from the “evils that society and the dysfunctional families inflict upon them”. (Eakins, S.) We need only to look at the headlines to see the crisis that we face in the classrooms today. Columbine High School is a good example of the worst society can inflict on our children. Schools are no longer the safe havens that they once were. The violence of the community streets which many of these children experience on a daily basis, now spills over into the schools. We live in a time when schools are being pressured to raise the achievement levels of their students, when special education is being scrutinized, and the districts have shied away from identifying students who are emotionally disturbed because of the stigma it carries. These students then remain in the regular classroom and the services that they so desperately need are not made available to them. An example of supportive services would be counseling, which is crucial to dealing with daily school and home crises.

In order to deal with the myriad of behavioral issues students bring to school, teachers are looking for new ways to deal with discipline issues in the schools. The current techniques are no longer as effective in dealing with current students. The new buzz words in discipline and classroom management are Dignity, Self-Responsibility, and Locus of Control. A program that incorporates these principles and has recently has received much attention is “Discipline with Dignity”. It was developed by Richard L. Curwin, Ed D., an education consultant and Allen N. Mendler, PhD., a psychologist and psychoeducational consultant in response to their recognition that different approaches to discipline were necessary.

“Discipline with Dignity” is a philosophy, an approach, and a set of strategies. It’s philosophy is based on a belief in the inherent, inviolable dignity of everyone regardless of her actions and behavior; on awareness of the basic need of all humans that motivates their behavior; and on the belief that the best and most effective discipline policy is the one that results in long term change through increased self-control.(Eakins,S.) Their approach is to deal with problem solving and prevention. Through the program, the students are provided with alternative methods of needs fulfillment as well as developing self- awareness, critical thinking, and self-control. A common theme throughout the program is “respect for the dignity of all individuals and their empowerment to find ways to resolve their problems and change their behavior.” (Eakins,S.) Curwin & Mendler believe that responsible behavior should be more valued then obedient behavior.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to determine the effectiveness of the “Discipline with Dignity” program in increasing appropriate behaviors in the classroom setting.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are several limitations inherent in the design of this study and must be considered when interpreting the results. The “Discipline with Dignity” program was applied to students enrolled in this researchers classroom and represents a convenience sample. These children may not be representative of the population of children with behavior disorders and therefore this study should be generalized with caution. In addition the sample size is extremely small.

Another source of limitation is the relatively brief implementation period which is being evaluated. The “Discipline with Dignity program was initiated and baseline measures were taken on September 30, 1999. Post - treatment measures were taken on March 1, 2000. Thus the treatment period was October 1st through March 1st.

RESEARCH QUESTION

There is a great deal of interest generated around the need to identify new techniques to manage behavior and to give to our students the social skills necessary to be successful in contemporary society. **Research Question:** Will an application of the program “Discipline with Dignity” increase the frequency and degree of socially appropriate behaviors exhibited by children who are classified with behavior disorders?

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following are terms which will be used throughout the study. Each term has a specialized operational definition which is drawn from the “Discipline with Dignity” manual.

OBEDIENCE MODEL: Following the rules without question, regardless of philosophical beliefs, ideas of right & wrong, instincts and experiences or values.

LOCUS OF CONTROL:

INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL: The individual perceives that he or she causes his or her own outcomes.

EXTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL: The individual perceives that the powerful forces or people outside the individual’s control cause things to happen to him or her.

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY: Taking responsibility for your own actions and monitoring your own behaviors.

DIGNITY: The degree of worth and honor.

BEHAVIOR DISORDER:

Emotionally Disturbed: means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a student’s educational performance due to:

- I. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors;**
- II. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;**
- III. Inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances;**
- IV. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness depression; or A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.**

SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENT: means a consistent inability to conform to the standards for behavior established by the school. Such behavior is seriously disruptive to the education of the student or other students and is not due to emotional disturbance as defined above.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

For the purpose of this study, the research and related literature was limited to three specific areas. The first area will be general literature dealing with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders and trends which currently effect discipline. The second area to be reviewed is literature dealing with Positive discipline techniques and the program “Discipline with Dignity”. The third and final area to be reviewed deals with teaching “Self- Responsibility” and also “Locus of Control, which represents the current zeitgeist when discussing prevention and intervention of discipline problems.

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

In light of the recent trend in school violence that plagues our schools today, society is taking a hard look at discipline, special education, and the area of emotional and behavioral disorders. The identification and classification of students with emotional or behavior disorders has come under much scrutiny in recent years. there are several different views on the subject. There are those who feel that there is an excessive stigma attached to labeling students as emotionally disturbed and that it will follow them their entire educational career. Another thought is by not labeling students as disturbed, schools are able to suspend or expel students easier. Data shows that those who are violent are not classified students. In the recent school shootings the students where not classified as emotionally disturbed, even though they had long histories of antisocial behaviors which where overlooked. The literature suggests in order to prevent or to intervene in the progression of a emotional or behavioral disorder the identification of particular signs of incipient emotional or behavioral problems in young children must take place with subsequent deliberate steps implemented to solve the problem. Also the literature suggests that we must intervene early in patterns of recurrent misconduct. (Kauffman,J.M., 1999)

Kauffman (1999) studied the current trends facing the prevention and intervention of emotional and behavior disorders. The first area that he looked into is the concerns for labeling. What the research shows is that the stigma usually precedes the label and the formal label assists in explaining the disability. Society

cannot hide the reality of deviant, antisocial behavior. The first step in dealing with a problem is recognizing it. Eventually the behavior will become so bad that it will have to be recognized. These students then become part of the special education population.

Along with labeling students with emotional or behavior disorders comes the possibility of wrongly identifying students. Society tends to go from one extreme to another. We prefer to make absolutely certain that an individual has become deviant before we will intervene. In the other extreme schools have gone to a zero tolerance policy and are quick to expel students for putative deviant behavior.

Another area that is suggested in the literature is that of special education ineffectiveness. The literature suggests that in relation to emotionally disturbed children, teachers are poorly trained and poorly supported and therefore ineffective. Kauffman feels that a sound prevention program requires intervention in multiple environments with multiple agencies. There needs to be more support systems available. Other impediments to properly serving emotionally disturbed students are general criticisms of special education. More feel that the percentage of students classified is too high but the research shows that in order to prevent antisocial, deviant behavior we must identify the problem. Others complain that special education already costs too much.

In order to properly address the problems presented by emotionally disturbed students, massive teacher training and supportive structures would be required. There should also be training for the general education teacher in the area of behavior management. Kauffman sums up his article by suggesting that we as educators, parents, and administrators should recognize that aggressive and disruptive behaviors, failure to meet academic expectations, social rejection, and interaction with antisocial peer groups are clear signs of what is to come. He further suggests that implementing school wide discipline plans, offering effective instruction in both academic and social skills, and using effective behavior techniques can contribute to primary prevention of emotional and behavioral disorders.

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

Educators, administrators, and parents now look for new ways to deal with the discipline problems that they face in the schools today. Current techniques are proving to be ineffective in dealing with the increasing school violence and antisocial behavior exhibited by students today. The philosophy of positive discipline and

discipline with dignity is receiving a great deal of attention. The idea of teaching students self- respect, empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance is what drives this philosophy. Acknowledging and rewarding even the smallest acts of positive behavior reinforces and teaches children responsible behavior. Curwin & Mendler(1990) suggest in their literature that behaving responsibly should be valued more than behaving obediently. They also advocate a discipline model that provides students incidental, or secondary, learning about self-worth, handling responsibility, solving problems, controlling their lives and affecting the consequences of their behavior. Curwin & Mendler suggest that the highest virtue of education is to teach students to be self responsible and fully functional. Most discipline models in practice today promote obedience which contradicts these concepts and leads to an inability to think clearly and critically. Furthermore, it promotes a feeling of helplessness. (Curwin,R.L. & Mendler, A.N., 1990)

Teaching Self-Responsibility & Internal Locus of Control

We as parents, educators, & administrators feel our job is to educate students to become independent, self-reliant, & productive members of society. The same holds true for students who have been labeled emotionally disturbed. Literature was reviewed that discussed the topics of teaching self-responsibility and internal locus of control. Both of these areas are a major component of the philosophy underpinning the program “Discipline with Dignity”.

The literature suggests that helping your students learn to take responsibility for their own actions and monitor their own behavior now will give them the skills they’ll need later to become responsible, reasonable adults. (Lincoln,W., 1993) According to these authors, the era of operant conditioning and teaching students to be blindly obedient are coming to a close. Educators realize that the many practices of yesterday are no longer effective in dealing with children that inhabit today’s schools. Consequently, they are very willing to rethink their approach to discipline and classroom management.

Teaching self-responsibility can be broken down into several specific areas which were consistent throughout most of the articles reviewed. The first is to create a warm, caring environment. Being open to suggestions & asking for student input, giving students some say in what is being taught and how it is presented, giving appropriate emotional support when needed, & praising when appropriate are all ways to foster the relationship between the teacher and students. These steps are the key to establishing a classroom environment which is devoted to learning and not discipline.

Another area is to guide the students in setting their own classroom rules. By allowing the students to have a say in the classroom rules it encourages them to make a commitment to following them. It also serves to bond the students and teacher together as partners.(Kovar,S., Ermler, K., 1992)

The next area is to teach the students to solve their own classroom behavior problems and to recognize desirable behaviors. Lincoln describes the six steps for solving a problem as follows:

- 1. Describe the problem behavior & examine why it isn't acceptable according to the class rules.**
- 2. Together write a list of acceptable behavior choices.**
- 3. Help the student evaluate the consequences for each choice.**
- 4. Have the student choose one option.**
- 5. As the student goes off to try that option be encouraging and praise for appropriate behavior.**
- 6. If the problem recurs, repeat the process. Remind the student that sometimes what's required is practice.**

It is felt that by encouraging and practicing this process of solving problems, the students will be able to internalize the steps and eventually follow them without adult guidance. By using this approach students will become self- disciplined by making their own behavior choices, experiencing the consequences of their behavior, and evaluating the appropriateness of their actions. (Kovar, S., Ermler, K. 1992) Gordon(1974) suggested that what students need is internal controls which comes only from relationships in which their needs are respected, not operant conditioning, obedience, and more external controls.

In looking at internal control or internal Locus of Control, research was conducted to investigate the changes in locus of control orientation that may result from teaching self-regulating procedures to control behavior. The concept of locus of control came from Rotter's social learning theory. Internal locus of control means that the individual perceives that he or she causes her own outcomes and external locus of control means that an individual perceives that external forces or people outside the individual's control cause things to happen to him or her. (Curwin, R., Mendler, A., 1990). The study found that both external and internal locus of control were effective

in maintaining and increasing appropriate behaviors as well as decreasing disruptive behaviors. However the self regulating procedures were found to be superior to that of external controls in increasing and maintaining constructive behaviors.(Autry, L., Langebauch,M., 1985)

SUMMARY

According to the literature reviewed, in order to deal with today's classroom management and discipline problems, we need to change the way we approach classroom management, to relinquish some of the control that we feel we need to have over our students and to teach them to behave responsibly. By teaching students self-worth, how to handle responsibility, solving problems, controlling their lives, & affecting the consequences of their behavior we can form a partnership with our students and promote an environment which spends more time devoted to learning and less to discipline. The literature suggests that by following this philosophy, we are teaching our students the skills necessary to assist them in becoming responsible and reasonable adults.

Will this philosophy work with students who are classified with emotional and behavior disorders? These are students who are enrolled in alternative school settings outside the neighborhood schools because they are unable to function and behave appropriately with the regular school population. This project will attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the program "Discipline with Dignity" and the philosophy of teaching self-responsibility as a means of handling classroom management and discipline with students who are classified with emotional and behavior disorders.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The sample for the study consists of eight elementary students, in two classrooms, located at the Salem County Special Services School District's Daretown facility. All the students represented in this study are classified with Emotional/Behavior disorders and are placed in this self-contained facility in accordance with the Least Restrictive Environment guidelines.

Collection of the Data

The Revised Behavior Checklist was completed by the classroom teacher for four students in each of two classrooms in September 1999. This will constitute baseline or pre- treatment data. Another checklist will be completed in March 2000 and will constitute post treatment data. The checklist was used to collect baseline data in six areas of problem behavior. This information is then transferred to scales to rate problem behavior in six areas which includes conduct disorder, socialized aggression, attention problems/immaturity, anxiety/withdrawal, psychotic behavior, and motor excess. A response sheet kept on each student to record answers from both the pre - treatment and post treatment checklists.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The basic purpose of the rating scale is to establish a degree or frequency of problem behaviors and to designate a target behavior for which to focus upon. The results of both checklists will presented for both classrooms. In combination with charts and graphs to aid in analyzing if changes occurred with individual pupils and also to determine if there are any differences between the two classrooms with regards to frequency and degree of socially appropriate behaviors. A narrative describing to differences in individual students will be provided.

Chapter 4

Analysis of Results

Introduction

The eight elementary students who are classified as emotionally disturbed were pre tested using the **Revised Behavior Problem Checklist** (October, 1999), to determine the degree and frequency of their behavior disorder and to establish a target behavior for which to monitor. After implementing the Discipline with Dignity program with the four students in classroom A, the children were post tested (March, 2000) to measure any change in their behavior.

Results

The **Revised Behavior Checklist** was administered in a pretest/ post test manner to establish a baseline for problem behaviors exhibited in the classroom, as well as target a specific behavior for intervention. The checklist is broken down into six categories consisting of conduct disorder (CD), socialized aggression (SA), attention problems/ immaturity (AP), anxiety/ withdrawal (AW), psychotic behavior (PB), and motor excess (ME). The results of the pretest and posttest are displayed in Graph 1 and 2.

A baseline was established, of behaviors exhibited in the classroom, for the students in both classroom A and classroom B. The students in classroom A received a score between 5 and 40 on the pretest checklist. They scored the highest in the areas of Conduct disorder (CD) and Attention Problems/Immaturity (AP). The students in classroom B received a score between 0 and 40 on the same pretest checklist. Minimal decreases were noted in the results of the post test checklist. Two students in classroom A showed an increase in several categories and two students in classroom B also showed an increase in several categories.

Classroom A

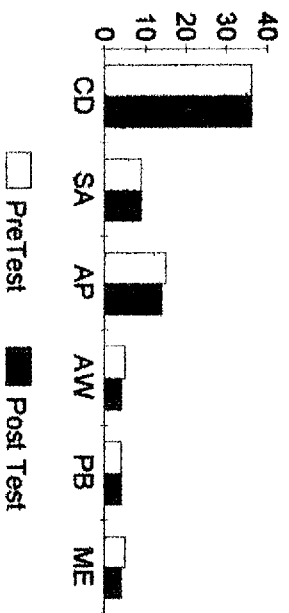
The four students in classroom A were exposed to the to the “Discipline with Dignity” program along with the board approved, school- wide discipline policy. A

Graph 1

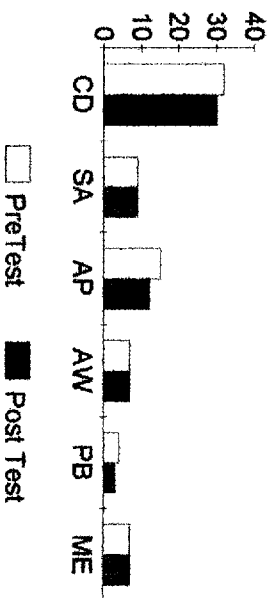
Results of PreTest and PostTest

Classroom A:

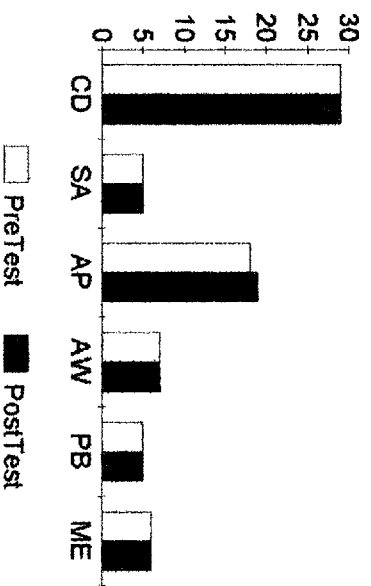
Student: RW



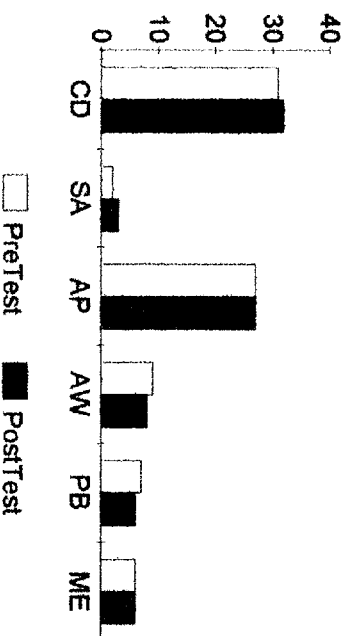
Student : IS



Student: CS



Student: LD

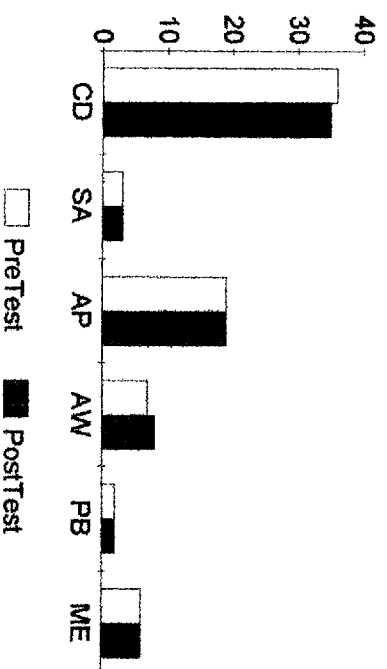


Graph 2

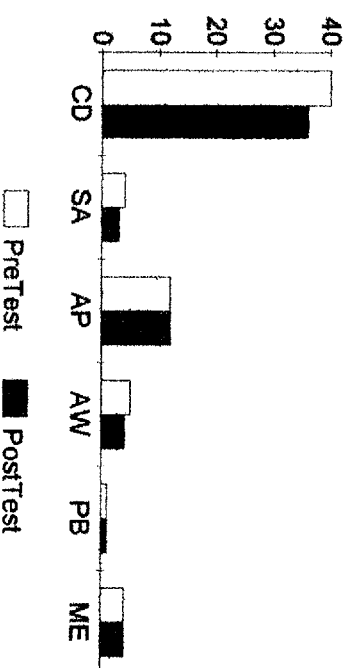
Results of PreTest and PostTest

Classroom B:

Student: 1

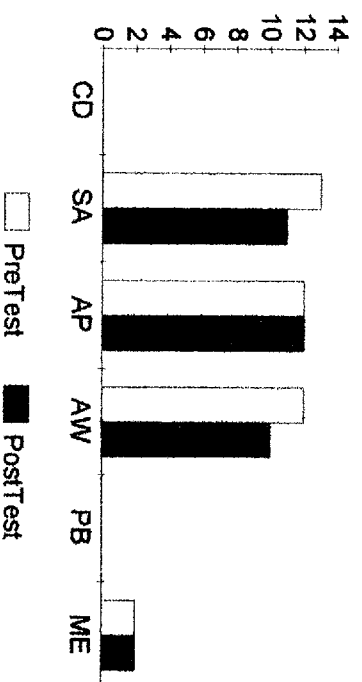


Student: 2

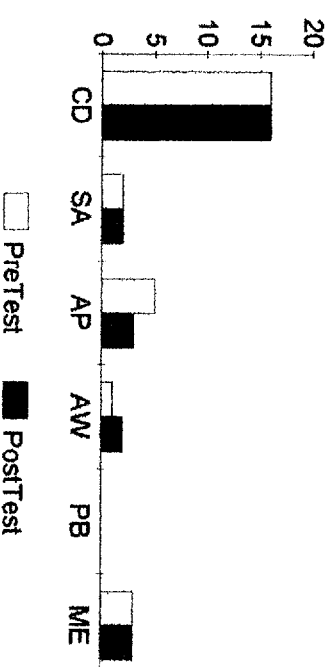


13

Student: 3



Student: 4



target behavior, for each student, was established in October to focus the intervention on. The number of target behaviors were recorded weekly and monthly as noted on Graphs 3,4,& 5.

The students were new to the school which alleviated already established behaviors. They spent the first month of school learning the rewards and consequences related to the school's discipline policy. In October, I started to implement the "Discipline with Dignity" program in the classroom. The first thing we did was discuss as a class what the rules of the classroom should be and they were posted. Also we started counseling session with the students after each target behavior. They consisted of having the child describe the behavior that was wrong, what rule was broken and what would have been some positive alternatives to their actions. When a student was believed to be a danger to himself or others, the school discipline policy took precedent and the counseling session took place when the student was calm. In almost every incident the student was able to answer the questions during the counseling session.

Another aspect of the program was preserving the students' dignity, which meant removing the student from the rest of view of the class to discipline them. The focus of discipline was to reward the positive behaviors and not acknowledge the negative behaviors. The students took to this quickly and would try to display positive behaviors to be recognized.

When analyzing the data recorded over the five months, it appears that the students responded well to the program in the beginning but as we neared the holiday months and the students were not in school as much, the behaviors escalated and there was minimal decrease in the remaining month following the holidays and snow days.

Summary

The students in both classroom A & B made minimal gains in their behavior over the course of the five months. There was no significant difference in the two classroom with the exception of a noticeable change in behavior during the months of November, December, and January when the students were out of school due to holidays and snow days.

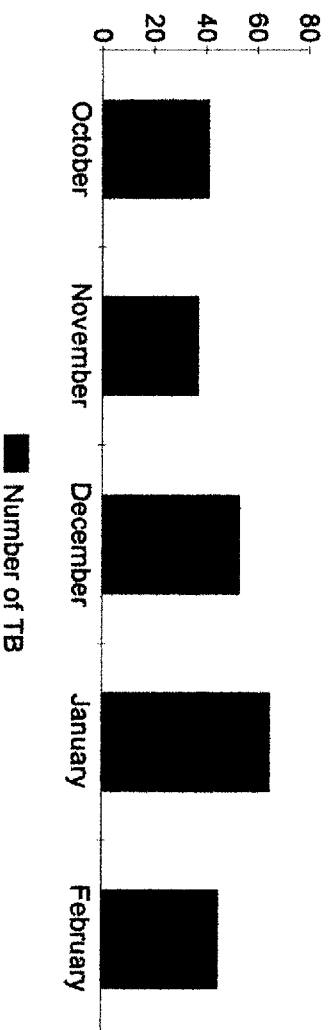
Graph 3

Number of Target Behaviors During "Discipline With Dignity" Program

Student: RW

TB: Verbal Interruptions, Inappropriate Language, Verbal Abuse of Peers & Staff.

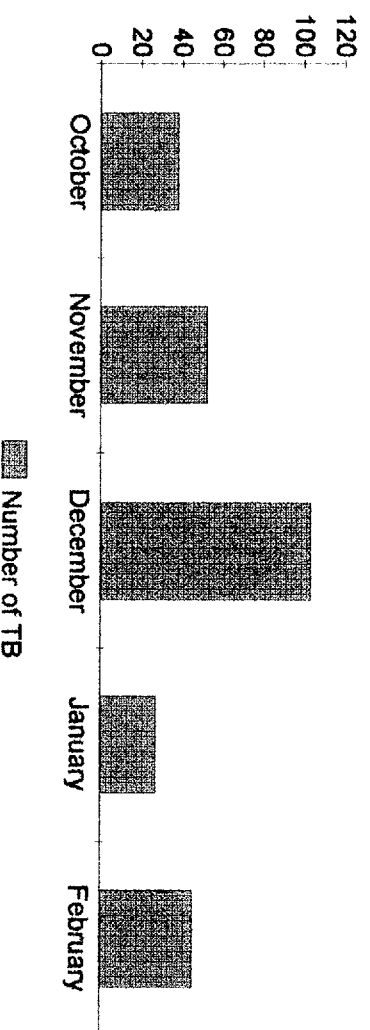
Student: RW



Student: IS

TB: Leaving the classroom, Movement about the classroom, Leaving the Building.

Student: IS



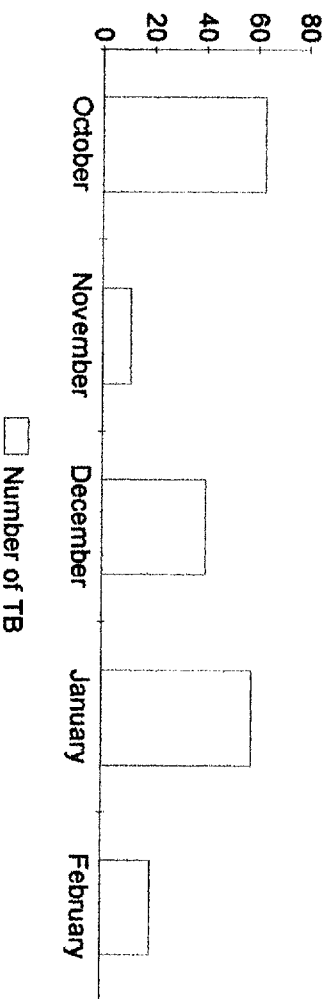
Graph 4

Number of Target Behaviors During "Discipline With Dignity" Program

Student: CS

TB: Physical Aggression Towards Staff & Classmates

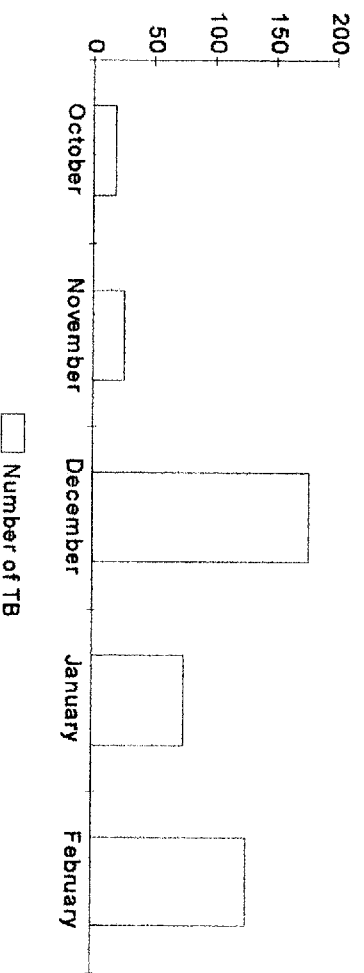
Student: CS



Student: LD

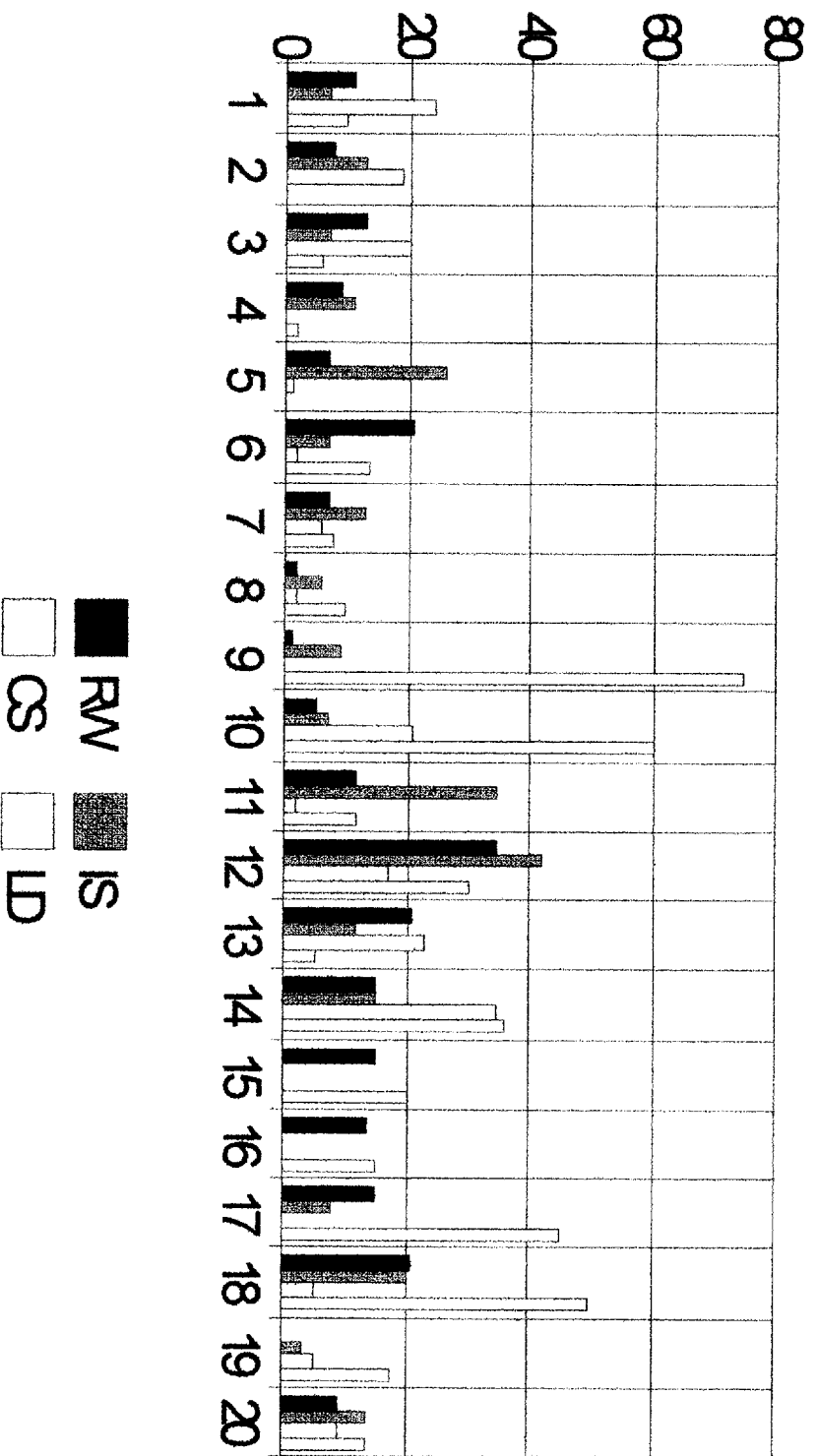
TB: Verbal Interruptions, Inappropriate Language, Verbal Abuse of Peers & Staff.

Student: LD



Graph 5

Weekly Number of TB



The students in classroom A made minimal progress with their target behaviors, but with the implementation of the “Discipline with Dignity” program there was a noticeable change in their self- esteem and confidence. Behavior management was also easier for me. There were no longer verbal confrontations but rather opportunities for modeling and teaching appropriate behavior. The data was inconclusive in proving that this program would work or not work with students with severe behavior disorders.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND DISCUSSIONS

SUMMARY

At a time when we as parents, administrators, and educators are experiencing an increase in incidents of school violence, new ways are being sought to deal with discipline issues. Children now bring to class a whole host of physical, emotional, psychological, and neurological problems which were unknown as recently as 20 years ago. The current techniques are no longer as effective in dealing with these students. Educators are looking for new ways to deal with the discipline issues in the schools. Literature dealing with the area of Emotional and Behavioral disorders and the current trends which effect discipline was reviewed. Also reviewed was the area of positive discipline techniques and the program “Discipline with Dignity”. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the “Discipline with Dignity” program in increasing appropriate behaviors in the classroom setting.

The Revised Behavior Checklist was completed by the classroom teacher, for four students in each classroom, to establish a degree or frequency of problem behaviors and to designate a target behavior for which to focus upon. The students in Classroom A were exposed to the “Discipline with Dignity” program along with the board approved, school - wide discipline policy. A target behavior was established for each student, to focus the intervention on.

The “Discipline with Dignity” program consists of a philosophy concerning positive discipline and strategies to implement in the classroom. Key aspects of the program were the individual counseling sessions used to acknowledge the inappropriate behavior and to discuss alternative behaviors, rewarding appropriate behaviors, preserving the students’ dignity when discipling, teaching self-responsibility, and developing their “internal locus of control”

RESULTS

After five months, the behaviors of the eight students were again rated by the checklist to determine if there was any change. Minimal decreases were noted on the post test checklist and there were increases in both classes in several categories. The students in classroom A responded well to the program in the beginning of the school year. There was a noticeable increase in inappropriate behaviors during the months of November, December, and January when the children were out of school due to holidays and snow days. The consistency of the program was hindered during this time. The students in classroom A made minimal progress with their target behaviors, but there was a noticeable increase in their self - esteem and self - confidence. The classroom environment changed during the implementation of this program. It became more positive and verbal confrontations were replaced with opportunities to model and teach self - responsibility. The responsibility and dignity given to the students empowered them to think of appropriate alternatives for their problems. They also came to view me as an active listener instead of one who inflicts punishments and consequences. They were willing to come and discuss a problem with me before acting on it.

The data was inconclusive in proving that the program would work or not work with students with severe behavior disorders. The relatively brief implementation period for this study along with the time of year effected the outcomes. The study revealed the positive effect of teaching self- responsibility and respecting the dignity of the students that we work with. Implementing the “Discipline with Dignity” program needs to be school - wide. The positive philosophy needs to be carried out over all aspects of the educational program. The key aspects of this program are based on the belief in the inherent , inviolable dignity of everyone regardless of her actions and behavior; on awareness of the basic need of all humans that motivates their behavior; and on the belief that the best and most effective discipline policy is one that results in long term change through increased self- control.(Eakins, S.) These aspects can and should be implemented in our classroom today regardless of whether or not the “Discipline with Dignity” program is used.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTHER STUDY

Suggestions for further study include research on the correlation of an increase of self- esteem and self- confidence as a result of being exposed to positive discipline techniques. Also a more in depth study could be done to determine if in fact the positive discipline approach could prove to be effective in increasing appropriate behaviors with students who are classified with severe behavior disorders.

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